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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this paper were: (1) to present a discussion of the uses of learning modules as part of a total effort in compentency-based teacher education programs, (2) to discuss the major components of learning modules in competency-based programs, and (3) to relate some personal considerations and concerns in the development and use of instructional modules for teacher-training programs in the field of reading. The sections of the paper include: "Competency-Based-Teacher Education Programs," which discusses accountability and the criteria of knowledge, performance, and product; "Instructional Modules in Reading," which discusses the processes of establishing a learning module; and "Some Personal Concerns in the Development of Learning Modules," which deals with the tendency to limit the post-evaluation component to the traditional paper and pencil test, the tendency for the developer to use educational terminology with which preservice teachers may not be familiar, and the need to determine if the learner learned. (WR)

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"The Development of Learning Modules for the Training of Content Teachers in Reading: A Focus on Process"

The purposes of this paper are: (a) to present a discussion of the uses of learning modules as part of a total effort in competency-based-teacher education programs (b) to discuss the major components of learning modules in competency-based programs and, (c) to relate some personal considerations and concerns in the development and use of instructional modules for teacher-training programs in the field of reading. Throughout this paper the discussion will focus on process not content, as it relates to the development of learning modules, although at times the content examples will be given.

Competency-Based-Teacher Education Programs

During the past decade, teacher education programs have been the focus of considerable criticism and debate from a number of sources. In the early and mid-sixties, the cry for community control of schools by adamant parents and community leaders, reflected a new militarism that many educators were not prepared to deal with. Parents and community leaders were demanding

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a voice in the education of their children for a number of reasons. One major reason was the fact that school systems, especially large urban systems, reported a continual decline in the achievement levels of their children. (Buder, 1972) In essence, what these parents and community leaders were saying was, you have demonstrated your inability to teach our children, now we demand a chance, even if it means a chance to fail for ourselves. (Roberts,1968)

Implicit in these demands for community control was the notion of "accountability". Simply stated, accountability meant that teachers, administrators, etc. must assume the responsibility for what happens to children in school between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. For example, if large groups of urban children come to school to learn to read, and according to various achievement indices they are not learning, then why?

Attempts to rationalize, defend or analyze some or all of the reasons for failure on both the part of the school and the students will not be made here. This writer's views on some of the reasons for these failures have been stated elsewhere. (Brunner, 1972) Needless to say, this writer feels that the two issues of who controls the educational inputs, and who is responsible for the educational outcomes are to a large degree responsible for some of the questions pondered by educators as they came to grips with the

notion of teacher competency.

Some of the major questions asked were: (a) what specific knowledge must a teacher have and demonstrate in order to effectively teach children? (b) after the demonstration of this knowledge gain, can the teacher perform at a level judged to be exemplary of desirable teaching behavior? and, (3) do the children who have been exposed to this teacher, in fact, learn at a desirable level?

In a competency-based-teacher education program these three criteria are called: (a) knowledge criteria-which are used to gauge the student's* cognitive understanding (b) performance criteria-which are used to assess the student's teaching behaviors and, (c) product criteria-which are measures of a pupil's growth as a result of being exposed to a particular teacher. (Arends, Masla, and Weber, 1973)

Instructional Modules in Reading

The heart of any instructional training program is in the quality and availability of its delivery systems. In

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*In this paper the word student refers to pre-service secondary students, although the term can be used for anyone working through the module.

this instance, the instructional module /also called learning activity packages/ is the key to a successful delivery system. Generally speaking, an instructional module can be defined as "a set of learning activities intended to facilitate the student's achievement and demonstration of an objective or set of objectives." (Arends, Masla, and Weber, 1973)

In secondary reading instruction for pre-service subject-matter teachers for example, one objective of a module may be, "the student will be able to demonstrate his knowledge of the reading process in a paper and pencil test with accuracy adjudged to be appropriate by the instructor", or "the student will demonstrate his ability to use the principle of 'readiness' in a real or simulated classroom situation." (Brunner and Rapicano, 1973)

After stating specific objectives and criteria and context are made known to the student, a set of appropriate learning activities must be written into the module. Some considerations when writing the learning activities should be: (a) do the activities have specific relevance to the stated objectives of the module? (b) have learning alternatives been included in the activities so that students can attain the same objective in different ways? eg. listen to an audio-tape on the nature of the reading process, observe a classroom where reading in the content areas is

being stressed, or have a conference with a reading specialist in a school system.

After the students have completed the learning activities, it is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of this this module in light of its stated objectives. Because the students are aware of the post-evaluation content and style of the module at all times, it is necessary to specify the criteria and competencies to be met, and under which conditions the competencies are to be evaluated. An example of the post-evaluation may be: "having a class session audio-taped demonstrating your ability to integrate the concept of reading readiness as it relates to your content area."

Instructional modules should also include a remediation phase. That is, if students do not perform at an acceptable level either in knowledge criteria or performance criteria then an appropriate set of remedial activities should be jointly worked out between the instructor and the student. In essence, an instructional module can be viewd as consisting of the following elements: rationale, objectives, prerequisites, pre-assessment, learning alternatives, post-assessment and remediation. (Houston, Hollis, et.al., 1971) The discussion in this paper has been on the processes involved in the writing of objectives, learning alternatives, post-assessment and remediation as critical components of learning modules.

Some personal concerns in the development of learning modules

As an educator involved in the training of pre-service teachers in the area of reading instruction and most recently involved in the development of learning modules for undergraduate teacher-training, this writer would like to share some of his concerns for the use of modules in teacher-training.

First, there is a tendency to limit the post-evaluation component to the more traditional paper and pencil variety. Although this may be a desirable and valid technique under certain circumstances, it doesn't offer much in the way of alternatives. If students are to be given alternative activities toward the attainment of a specific objective, it seems logical that evaluation alternatives need to be included also. For example, students could audio-tape their reaction to a particular activity and play it back with the instructor present to evaluate competency. Or, students could arrange individual conferences with the instructor after the completion of a set of learning activities.

My second concern regarding the development of learning modules is the tendency for the developer to use educational terminology that pre-service students may not be familiar with. As reading educators, we need to assess the "readability" level of our materials, in this case, the instructional module. This is also true of learning

packages that have been developed by educators unfamiliar with students in a particular program. In a recent graduate course, one of my students reported that after having applied a readability formula to learning packages used in her school, they indicated a level of difficulty two to three grade levels above the reading levels of her students. Yet the school had purchased these packages from an "outside" source in order to help students learn certain skills.

Learning modules need to be both specific and clearly written so that students knew what is expected of them and underwhat conditions. Similarly, developers of learning modules need to expand not limit student input at all levels, for there is the ever-increasing danger of the module approach to disengage the student from the instructor in the learning process. The last thing we need in teacher education is further isolation of students and instructors.

Finally, in order to maintain an openness and flexibility in competency-based programs utilizing instructional modules, it is essential to establish a systematized way to evaluate the instructional module. In their handbook, Arends, Masla, and Weber (1973) present a checklist for the evaluation of instruction modules which this writer found especially helpful.

Finally, a critical question that needs to be asked when developing instructional modules for the training of reading teachers is, did it help the learner acquire certain competencies and provide him with practice opportunities to demonstrate those competencies? In other words,did the learner learn?

If the answer is yes, then instructional modules for the training of reading teachers have a future.

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